

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks at a Rally for Governor John Kitzhaber in Portland, Oregon
October 20, 2010

The President. Hello, Portland! Thank you! Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you very much, everybody. It is good to be back in the State of Oregon. And it is an honor to be standing here with your next Governor, John Kitzhaber.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. I love you back. Great to be here.

Now, I have to, first of all, say, look, I've got a special place in my heart for Oregon. My best friend from high school lives in Eugene and is a big Ducks fan. So he's got season tickets. I'm always getting some e-mail from him about how good they're doing. Congratulations.

Now, on the other hand, my brother-in-law happens to be the coach of the Beavers. But I'm not confused. [*Laughter*] I root for them both. I've got the whole State covered.

We've got some wonderful guests here. You may have heard from a couple of them, but I want to make sure that you hear—that I have a chance to introduce them. First of all, your outstanding senior Senator, Ron Wyden, is in the house. Give him a big round of applause. Your outstanding junior Senator, Jeff Merkley, is here. My great friend and one of my earliest supporters who always has that little bike thing on his lapel—[*laughter*—Earl Blumenauer is here. One of his outstanding partners in the House of Representatives, is doing a great job, David Wu is here.

Audience members. Wu! Wu! Wu!

The President. Wu! Wu, Wu, Wu. Just want everybody—I want all the press to be clear—they were saying: Wu. [*Laughter*] Secretary of State Kate Brown is here. State Treasurer Ted Wheeler is here. And Attorney General Kroger is here.

Now, Portland, let's talk about this Governor's race for a second. This should not be a difficult choice. [*Laughter*] This should not be a difficult choice. I know you have a race where both candidates are talking about change. But there's only one candidate who's actually delivered change. And that's John Kitzhaber.

When John—you know John's track record. When John was Governor, this economy grew, created more than 120,000 new jobs. When John was Governor, he increased access to health care for thousands of children. When John was Governor, he invested in education and improved Oregon's public schools. When John was Governor, he protected the environment of one of the most beautiful States in the Nation, brought clean energy industries to Oregon.

I have heard that John is an outstanding fly fisherman. Another reason to vote for him. That's why he cares about the environment so much. He's out there. And if you send in your ballot for John, this State will continue to be on the cutting-edge of America's future. That's what you know.

I mean, look, here is a guy who has already done the job and done it well. After John last served as Governor, he was a national leader on health care. He could have gone anywhere. He could have done anything, but he chose to stay here because his commitment to Oregon is personal. As an emergency room doctor, as a legislator, as a Governor, as a father, he spent his

life fighting for the people of Oregon. That's why you need him again. You need him one more time.

Now, I just want to say I'm getting a cold. I'm actually getting over it, but I would suspect by the end of this speech, I am going to be hoarse. [*Laughter*] But I know it won't matter because you are going to be fired up, even if you can't hear me.

You're going to be fired up. Because in less than 2 weeks—in less than 2 weeks, you can set the direction of this State and this country not just for the next 2 years, not for the next 4 years, not just for the next 10 years, for the next 20 years. Just like you did in 2008, you can defy the conventional wisdom. Yes you can. Yes you can.

Audience members. Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can!

The President. I think they're fired up!

Audience members. Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can!

The President. You can defy the conventional wisdom because you know what the conventional wisdom always is. They say you can't overcome the cynicism of politics. No, you can't overcome the special interests; no, you can't overcome the big money; no, you can't overcome the negative ads; no, you can't—no, you can't—no, you—there's always somebody out there saying, no, you can't. But in 2 weeks you've got a chance to say, yes we can.

There is—look, now, I want to be clear, though. There's no doubt this is a difficult election. I know you guys love your Trail Blazers. I understand. That's okay. And we've been through an incredibly difficult time as a nation. But I want you to think about how we got here.

For most of the last decade, middle class families saw their incomes actually fall. Between 2001 and 2009, the average middle class family saw their income fall 5 percent when the other party was in charge. We had the most sluggish job growth since the Great Depression in those 8 years when the other party was in charge. Meanwhile your cost of health care skyrocketed. Your cost of sending your kids to college skyrocketed. Too many jobs were shipped overseas. Too many parents weren't sure whether if their child got sick they could send them to a doctor.

Americans were working two jobs or three jobs just to make ends meet. And then all of this finally culminated in the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. And I want everybody to understand that this recession started long before I took office. We had lost—we lost 4 million—we lost 4 million jobs in the 6 months before I was sworn in; 750,000 the month I was sworn in; 600,000 the month after that; 600,000 the month after that. We lost almost 8 million jobs, most of them lost before any of our economic policies were put into place.

Now, you would have thought that given the crisis, when we got to Washington Democrats and Republicans would come together, we'd put politics aside and deal with this once-in-a-generation challenge. I hoped, I expected that we could move beyond the game-playing and the partisanship and the bickering that had dominated for Washington so long, roll up our sleeves and get to work. Because although we are proud to be Democrats, we are prouder to be Americans. And all of us have a stake in creating a better future.

But the Republican leaders in Washington, they made a different decision.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Look, now, here's what they calculated—and it was a clever political calculation. They said to themselves, boy, we made such a big mess—[*laughter*]*—we are in*

such a deep hole that it's going to take everything Obama's got just to try to get us out of it. It's going to take some time to repair the economy. Folks are going to be frustrated and angry. And if we just sit on the sidelines and oppose Obama and Democrats every step of the way, if we say no even to the policies that traditionally we've supported to help small businesses or to cut taxes, then maybe we can ride people's anger and frustration; they'll forget that we were the ones who caused this thing in the first place.

In other words—in other words, Oregon, their working theory was—the basis of their campaign is amnesia. [*Laughter*] They figure you're going to forget because you're angry about the situation.

I understand that. But make no mistake, this election isn't about anger, it's not about fear. This election is a choice. And the stakes could not be higher. If they win this election, then you know that the other guy's priorities are going to be different than John's.

Nationally, if they win this election, the chair of the Republican campaign committee promised to pursue the "exact same agenda" that they did before I took office.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. No, no. And we know what this agenda is. I mean, there are no surprises here unless you've forgotten, unless you're suffering from amnesia.

Audience members. No!

The President. Let's see, we'll cut taxes for millionaires and billionaires; that's part of their agenda.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. We will cut rules for special interests, including polluters.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. We'll cut middle class families loose to fend for themselves.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. So if you're somebody with a preexisting condition, can't get health care, tough luck, you're on your own. That's their theory. If you can't find a job, tough luck, you're on your own. If you're a young person who can't afford a college education, tough luck, you're on your own. That's their theory.

Audience members. No!

The President. And, by the way, these are the same folks who say that they're concerned about debt and the deficit. Except it turns out that they took a record surplus from a Democratic President and created a record deficit and helped nearly destroy our economy. You can't forget. This is similar to the agenda that John's opponent wants to pursue right here in Oregon.

And, Portland, it is up to you to tell them we haven't forgotten. We don't have amnesia. And we don't want what you're selling, because we've tried it before and we didn't like it because it didn't work.

We don't want them rolling back health reform, so insurance companies can deny you coverage because you're sick. We don't want them rolling back Wall Street reform, so now credit card companies can go back to hitting you with hidden fees and penalties. We don't want

their plan to cut education by 20 percent, so they can give a \$700 billion tax break to the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans.

Audience members. No!

The President. We have tried that before, and we're not going back.

So, look, obviously we've got a long way to go. We've got a lot of work to do. That's why John wants to run. That's why John got in this race, because he knows Oregon needs you; he knows Oregon needs his experience, his wisdom, his compassion.

And, look, we know we've got a lot of work to do, but the economy is growing again. The private sector has created jobs for 9 months in a row. But we've got a lot of work to do. There's still a lot of people hurting out there. And there are a lot of people hurting right here in Oregon. That's what keeps me up at night. That's what keeps me fighting. That's what keeps John up at night.

But I also—I know this: The biggest mistake we can do right now is go back to the same policies that caused all this hurt in the first place. And I say this not because I want to relitigate the past. I just don't want to relive the past.

Oregon, imagine the Republicans driving a car into the ditch. [*Laughter*] And it's a deep ditch. And so we decided, well, we got to go get that car out of the ditch. And so me and Wyden and Merkley and Wu and Blumenauer and the Democrats, we went down there, we put on our boots. It was muddy down there. It's hot. There are bugs everywhere. [*Laughter*] But we knew we had to get that car out of the ditch. So we start pushing on that car. We start pushing and pushing. And every once in a while we look and the Republicans are up there, just standing there. [*Laughter*] Not lifting a finger. [*Laughter*] And we—and we tell them, why don't you come down and help, because you all got the car into the ditch? They say, no, that's all right, but you need to push harder. You're not pushing the right way. [*Laughter*]

So we just kept on pushing. And finally we get this car up on level ground. Finally, it's pointing in the right direction. It's a little—it's a little banged up. It needs to go to the body shop. It needs a tune-up. But we're pointed in the right direction. And suddenly, we get this tap on our shoulder, and we look back and who is it? It's the Republicans. And they're saying to us, Oregon, we want the keys back. And we got to tell them, you can't have the keys back because you don't know how to drive. You don't know!

Have you ever noticed, when you want to go forward in the car you got to put your car in "D." [*Laughter*] When you go backwards, you put it in "R." We don't want to go back into the ditch. And the Republicans, they can come with us, but they're going to have to sit in the backseat.

Look, John and I, we've got a different idea about what the future should look like. And it's an idea rooted in our belief about how this country was built and what we've seen in our own lives. Look, we know that government doesn't solve every problem out there. We believe that government should be lean and efficient. But in the words of the first Republican President, Abraham Lincoln—who, by the way, would have trouble getting a nomination in the Republican Party right now—Honest Abe said that government should do for people what they cannot do better for themselves.

So we believe in a country that rewards hard work and responsibility. We believe in a country that prizes innovation and entrepreneurship. But we also believe in a country where

we look after one another. Where we say, I am my brother's keeper; I am my sister's keeper. That's the America I know. That's the choice in this election.

We see a future where the next century is driven by American innovation, American ingenuity. We're investing in science and technology. And we no longer are giving tax breaks to companies that ship jobs overseas. We give our tax breaks to companies that are investing right here in Oregon, right here in the United States, to small businesses, to American manufacturers, to clean energy companies. I don't want solar panels or wind turbines or electric cars made in Europe or Asia. I want them made here in the United States of America with American workers. That's the choice in this election.

We see an America where every single American—every—everybody has the skills and the training to compete with any worker in the world.

Now, the other side might think it's a good idea to cut education by 20 percent. But you know what? China is not cutting its education budget by 20 percent. Korea is not cutting it by 20 percent. Germany is not cutting it by 20 percent. They're not playing for second place. The United States of America doesn't play for second place. We play for first place. And that means training our kids to compete.

That's why tens of billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies that used to go to big banks, because they were the middlemen in the student loan program, even though they weren't taking any risks. That money we took and we sent it where it should be going, to students and to families. That's why we intend to make our new college tax credit permanent, worth \$10,000 in tuition relief for every student, whether you are a Duck or a Beaver or any other college student here.

We see an America where opportunity is shared and the middle class is growing; where the only limit to your success is how hard you're willing to try. And that's why we want to give tax cuts to middle class families and make those permanent. That's why we believe in making sure Social Security is there not just for this generation, but for the next generation, and we will not privatize Social Security. The last thing we want to do is hand it over to Wall Street.

We believe—yes, we believe in making sure that we leave clean air and clean water for the next generation; that Oregon is as beautiful 50 years from now as it is today. And that means working with a partner in the statehouse to make sure that we're enforcing laws against pollution. That's the choice in this election. That's what we're fighting for.

But right now the same special interests that would profit from the other side's agenda, they're fighting back hard. To win this election, they are plowing tens of millions of dollars through front groups. They're running misleading negative ads all across America.

And these folks, they don't disclose who the donors are. They've got these innocent-sounding names—Americans for Prosperity or Moms for Motherhood. *[Laughter]* I made that last one up. *[Laughter]* But you don't know where this money is coming from. It could be insurance companies, Wall Street banks. It could be foreign-controlled corporations. We don't know.

This is not just a threat to Democrats; this is a threat to democracy. And the only way to fight it—the only way to match millions of dollars in negative ads is with millions of voices of people who care and want to finish what we started in 2008.

That's where you come in. That's where you come in. We need you all to mail in your ballots—now. Mail them in. If everybody who fought for change in 2008 shows up to vote in 2010, then John is going to win his election.

But you got to mail in that ballot. Let me just see a show of hands. Who hasn't mailed in their ballots yet? Fess up. Come on, guys. Let's go. Let's go. You just got it? All right, well, go tomorrow then.

But you have to vote. You have to vote. Look, a lot of you got involved in 2008 because you believed that we were at a defining moment in our history. You believed that the decisions we make right now won't just affect us; they'll affect our kids and our grandkids—for decades to come. That's why you knocked on doors. That's why you made phone calls and talked to your friends and neighbors. Some of you voted for the very first time, because you believed you could play a part in shaping history.

So now we're in the process—not just talking about change, now we're in the process of bringing about change. But you know what? It's hard. I said it was going to be hard during the campaign. Some of you didn't believe me. *[Laughter]* It's hard. We're grinding it out, inch by inch, day by day, week by week, month by month. There are—and this is a big, messy democracy. And so people get into arguments and folks push back. And the special interests, they don't go down without a fight. It is not easy.

And that means that sometimes it can wear you down. And all that hope that we felt when we had that 70,000-person rally in Portland on that beautiful day, or some of that hope that we had on election night, or some of that hope that we had on Inauguration Day when Beyonce was singing and Bono was singing and everything was great, sometimes that fades.

And then you see—some of you—some of you see family members who still haven't found a job, or you see another foreclosure sign in a house down the street. And you're seeing all these negative ads and you're seeing pundits tearing folks down and you just get discouraged and turned off.

But here's the thing I need you to remember. Don't ever let anybody tell you this fight isn't worth it. Don't let them tell you you're not making a difference. Because of you, there are folks all across the country who don't have to choose between losing their home or treating their cancer. Because of you, parents can look their kids in the eye and say, you're going to go to college. Because of you, a business owner got a small-business loan and keeping their doors open. Because of you, 100,000 brave men and women are no longer fighting a war in Iraq. That's because of you.

Don't let them tell you that change isn't possible, because here's what I know. If our parents, if our grandparents, if our great grandparents listened to the cynics 50 years ago, or 100 years ago or 200 years ago, we wouldn't be here tonight. Think about it. Those 13 Colonies wouldn't have the courage to start a revolution. Louis and Clark would have never made it out here.

The only reason we are here is because past generations have been unafraid to push forward, to do what's necessary, even in the face of uncertainty, even in the face of difficulty. That's how we came through war and came through depression. That's how we got civil rights, and women's rights, and workers' rights. That's the spirit we need today, Oregon. That's the spirit we need today, Portland.

The journey we began was not about putting me in the White House, it was about building a movement for change and realizing the promise of America. And if you are willing to keep fighting, and knocking on doors, and making phone calls, and mailing in your ballots, then not only are we going to elect John, but we are going to preserve that American Dream and American promise for centuries to come.

God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:05 p.m. at the Oregon Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to entertainers Beyonce G. Knowles and Paul D. "Bono" Hewson; and Rep. Pete Sessions. He also referred to his brother-in-law Craig Robinson, in his capacity as head coach of the Oregon State University men's basketball team.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Governor John Kitzhaber, rally in Portland, OR.

Locations: Portland, OR.

Names: Blumenauer, Earl; Brown, Kate; Dudley, Chris; Hewson, Paul D. "Bono"; Kitzhaber, John A.; Knowles, Beyonce G.; Kroger, John; Merkley, Jeff; Robinson, Craig; Wheeler, Ted; Wu, David; Wyden, Ronald L.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Business and industry : Domestic investment, proposed tax breaks for; Business and industry : Labor issues :: Organized; Civil rights : Civil rights movement; Civil rights : Women's rights and gender equality; Economy, national : Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act; Economy, national : Household incomes, decline; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession effects; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national Recession, effects; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; Education : Postsecondary education :: Tax credits, expansion; Education : Technology and innovation, expansion efforts; Elections : 2010 congressional elections; Elections : Campaign finance laws; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Outsourcing to foreign countries; Environment : Air quality, improvement efforts; Environment : Pollution prevention and reduction efforts; Health and medical care : Affordability and costs; Health and medical care : Health care reform; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Young adults, insurance coverage as dependents, age limit extension; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Oregon : Democratic Party events; Oregon : Election, gubernatorial; Oregon : Governor; Oregon : President's visits; Science and technology : Research and development; Sessions, Pete; Social Security and retirement : Social Security program; Taxation : Tax relief; Water quality, improvement efforts.

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